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The Involvement of Women as the Domestic Decision Maker: A Study of Patna Metropolitan City, Bihar, India

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Abstract

In this paper, the importance of women in decision-making at family level in Patna City (Bihar, India) has been studied in detail. The status of women in society is a significant indicator of the socio-economic development of a region. The crucial parameters regarding women, such as their freedom of movement, involvement in family matters, the decision in the purchase of home assets and family planning, etc. are chosen to ascertain the degree of women empowerment in the study area. On the basis of these variables, the women's decision-making index (DMPI) has been calculated to determine the socio-economic status of women in their respective families. The study is based on primary data collected from 500 women having the age between 18 to 60 years in Patna city using stratified sampling method. The present report also examines some important features and autonomous factors which usually affect women's decision-making ability at the family or domestic level. In the study area, it was found that the power of women in decision-making was historically limited primarily due to patriarchal ideology. The study reveals that about 45% of the women enjoyed equal status in the family with regard to taking various decisions. The educational level and employment status of women was observed to be the most important factor determining their empowerment and involvement in decision making in all spheres of domestic life.

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INTRODUCTION

It is an established fact that women contributes substantially to any nation's advancement and growth. However, in many underdeveloped and developing countries, women's participation remains poor primarily on the account of traditional conservatism and notorious actions of their family in particular and society in general. Women are generally considered to be less capable than men, which significantly affects their activity in many spheres of life and as a result, they become restricted to only household work. It is well known that women possess all the capabilities required to take and implement any decision, but they usually lack sufficient power to actually carry out any decisive role in active decision making.

Women's status in society can be reflected by their legal rights, educational standards, health status, employment position, and decision-making. Many social, cultural and religious attitudes have resulted in discriminatory laws and practices against women which prevent them from performing their due role in society and economy.

In traditional and developing nations, the discrimination against women from the cradle to the grave has often constrained them towards the attainment of education, income-earning capabilities, economic self-sufficiency and contributed to their declining status in society.

In addition to women's role in strengthening a family financially, they also perform significant home-making duties and fulfils various important responsibilities according to their socio-economic status. As a member of a family and as a part of society, women are involved in various professions with various natures, which are governed by different factors (Reddy & Narayan, 1987). In many important social commitments, such as marriage decisions, dowry issues, selection of the male partner, education of children, expenses and overhead management of marriage etc., the contribution of women is significantly high.

According to a study on "Women empowerment: A key to Human Development," Barkat (2008), noted that an ordered women empowerment can only be obtained by enriching their social as well as economic position. This can be materialized only via taking or implementing several important economic and social policies in line with the full growth of women. In addition, it

is also very crucial to help them recognizing the fact that they have the perspective to be a resilient personalities.

Sharma (2007), has noted that women empowerment is commonly associated with women's struggle for social justice and equality. This has proved to be disadvantageous in disregarding women and also implanted negative changes in the direction and nature of society. In order to gain the capabilities of decision making and fulfilling them with substantial knowledge, self-respect as well as full confidence, the empowerment is considered to be a strong approach. Maral & Kumar (2017), suggested that women's role is an essential constituent which develops the human structure of family and society. The inclusive development of society and nation greatly depends upon women's participation in the majority of the socio-economic and political activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present survey of literature enables multifaceted, interpersonal and demonstrative understanding of women's authorization and decision-making. According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment is "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability." He provided a supportive notional explanation of empowerment, which states that the first order decision-making capacity with anticipated consequences includes three unified scopes namely resources, agency, and achievements.

The mentioned perceptions of empowerment are not similar with the initiations and realizations of empowerment for the decision-making phases, (Alkire et al., 2013) including the occurrence, practice, and usefulness of choice (Longwe, 1995), since these are related with the personalized and circumstantial perceptions of empowerment. (Joshi, 2014) revealed that the overall empowerment and the involvement in decision-making procedures will empower women, which will progressively govern economic growth significantly. This perception is very helpful to realize several crucial issues which induce and facilitate empowerment.

Employed women are more conscious in the matter of interaction with other people through participation in the social organization. Enhanced

family income reduced the disparity between earning and purchasing power which improves the quality of life in terms of food and nutrition, their illness behavior, living condition, education, recreation, health, the social aspect of well-being and economic autonomy in the form of equality among males and females as the decision-maker (Bergman, 1986).

Women's employment, which is an essential aspect of economic development is also believed to serve this purpose to great extent. Employment makes women more conscious about their individual rights and they have been seen to be positively associated with the reading and enjoyment programs (Rathod, 2009). In addition, empowering women is very important since it automatically improves their status in many sectors such as politics, economics, finance, and health. Essentially, for the accomplishment of maintainable growth (Mishra, 2006), empowerment is very a crucial method since it combines an individual's capability for identifying her potentials and opportunities and grow her skills to resolve them (Eyben *et al.*, 2008).

It is important to mention that women and men both should perform equally in creative and reproducible life that includes mutual duties and responsibilities for caring and growing kids and also in maintaining a house (Jejeebhoy, 2002). According to Rao (1998), the social status of an individual in a particular position in relation with other individuals, by virtue of which she is the recipient of respect and prestige, and wields influence and which can be recognized by symbols of prestige accruing to her and her actions. Varghese (2011), studied women empowerment in Oman, which is grounded upon five autonomous variables via considering women empowerment as the dependent variable. According to this report, the women in Oman are superior as the domestic decision-makers. They are also good at economic

decision making than social empowering decisions. In a parallel study, Das (2011) reported different limitations of women empowerment in Karbi tribes of Assam, which are related to societal, political, economic, technical and spiritual. He also mentioned that 'lack of knowledge about new technology and information is one of the key reasons responsible for the deprived women empowerment in this community.

Singh & Kumar (2013) reported that the higher score of empowerment indices supports this opinion that role of women has changed from a mere family worker to a manager. The changing role of women was more evident in nuclear family households where husbands have migrated. In joint families, migration did not have much influence on the role of women, because the head of the joint family generally takes the responsibility of decision-making. Pandey & Rai (2017), explained that women empowerment is essential for sustainable economic growth and reduction of poverty in developing countries. Although women's empowerment is not a sufficient condition, it is still a necessary condition for the development process. Economically empowered women play a more active role in household decision-making, with greater bargaining power and increased spending on education and development.

OBJECTIVES

The present study is aimed at the following objectives:

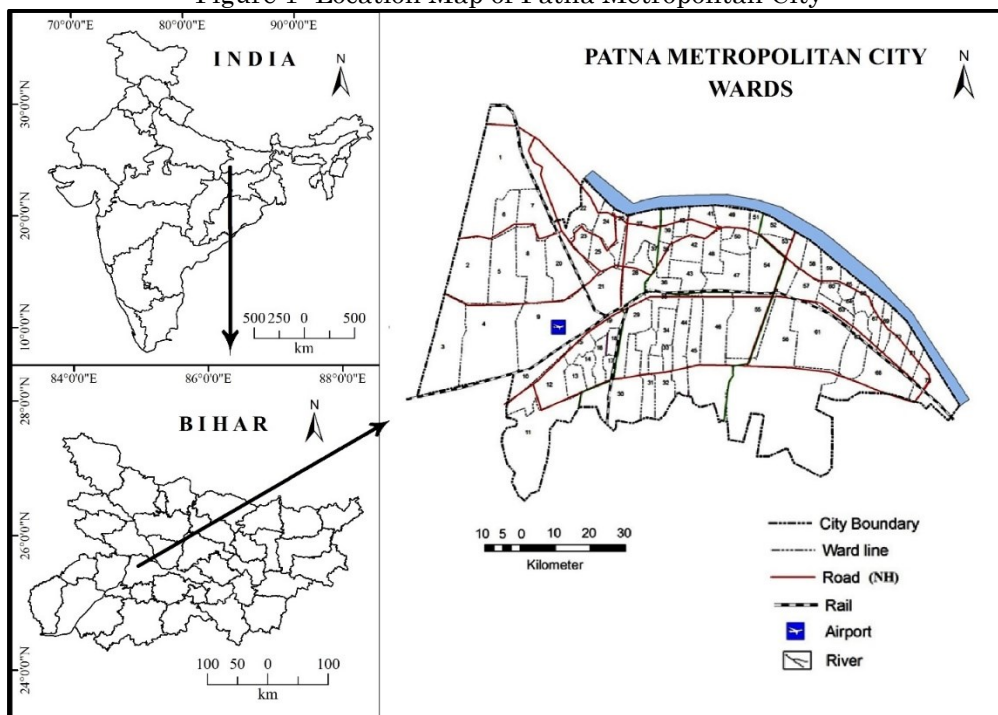
- a) Exploring the socio-economic status of women in the study area.
- b) Analysing the involvement of women in decision-making process in the family.

STUDY AREA

Patna, the capital of Bihar, is located on the southern bank of the River Ganga. It is located between $25^{\circ} 35'$ to $25^{\circ} 38'$ North latitude and $85^{\circ} 5'$ to $85^{\circ} 16'$ East longitude and has an elevation of 53 m above the mean sea level. Patna Municipal Corporation occupies a total area of 109.22 km². It is one of the most important historical cities of India and is situated along the natural levee of the river Ganga in the middle Ganga plain. Patna is a distinctive city in the northern part of India, which is known for its historic glory maintained from the period of Magadh and the Mauryan

ruling. For administrative convenience, the city is divided into 72 municipal wards that come under the purview of Patna Municipal Corporation. Wards are further grouped into 4 circles namely New Capital Circle (Western zone), Kankarbagh Circle (Southern zone), Bankipore Circle (Central zone) and Patna City Circle (Eastern zone). As per the Census data published in 2011, Patna city has a population of 1,683,200 within the corporation jurisdiction. The sex ratio of the population stands at 882 which is substantially lower than the national average of 943 females per 1000 males. The literacy stands at 84.71 percent, with male literacy of 87.71 per cent, and female literacy being 81.33 per cent.

Figure 1- Location Map of Patna Metropolitan City



Source: The authors (2016)

The position of women or their status in society is a significant indicator of socio-economic development. Unfortunately, women in Patna city have not fully attained the right to education, employment and power in the same way as their male counterparts even after 70 years of independence. The increasing gender gap in literacy is also noticeable in the study area. Due to lower literacy among females, their engagement in the workforce is also comparatively lower and women workers are primarily engaged in an unorganized sector of the economy which offers less security both socially

and financially. There is no doubt that, women's development has been a focal point in many of the Government-sponsored programs but even after seven decades of planned development, women have not attained expected success in the mainstream of development. Dowry issue, exploitation of women, financial dependence, negligible participation in the decision-making process, biased attitude and many such factors are the main obstacles behind the reduced advancement of women in India, particularly in the study area of Patna city.

MAIN TEXT

Research Methods

The dimensions of women empowerment discussed in this paper is closely associated with the data collected and analyzed from the field assessment by authors. The city is divided into 72 municipal wards that come under the jurisdiction of Patna Municipal Corporation. The survey has been conducted and initiated arbitrarily. Primary data has been composed of women having the age between 18 to 60 years within the study area. 500 women were selected using a stratified arbitrary sampling method. The quantitative measurement of women empowerment in the surveyed area includes the selection of appropriate dependent and independent variables to study the involvement of women in decision-making process. The selected variables cover nearly every dimension associated with women's empowerment in the study region.

The explained variables of women empowerment are selected in four dimensions i.e. freedom of movement, family matters, purchase of home assets and family planning. These four dimensions of women empowerment are further classified into 16 clarified variables with four 4 clarified variables in each dimension with the code: Never (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3) and Always (4). Decision-making power Index (DMPI) is calculated on the basis of composite allocated value of 16 clarified variables covering these four dimensions of women empowerment.

A series of explanatory variables have been selected as predictors for checking their importance in the clarified variables of women's empowerment (Table 2). The present study examines important features, especially the autonomous variables, which greatly influences the decision-making capabilities of women at the domestic level. This study generated a multiple linear regression model for obtaining the general impact of the independent variables on women's decision-making capability. The DMPI has been obtained for evaluating the multiple linear regression model after incorporating all independent variables as mentioned below:

DMPI = Real score of the level of awareness for each respondent $\times 100$ / Maximum score for each respondent.

where DMPI = decision-making power index as the level of empowerment.

The 6 selected independent variables for observing the decision-making process are women's age group, religion, social group, education, occupation and income. These variables are considered in the multiple linear regression model as follows:

$$Y (\text{DMPI}) = B_0 + B_1 \times X_1 + B_2 \times X_2 + B_3 \times X_3 + B_4 \times X_4 + B_5 \times X_5 + B_6 \times X_6$$

where B_0 = Intercept constant; B_1 - B_6 = Coefficient of each independent variables; X_1 = Age Group; X_2 = Religion; X_3 = Social Group; X_4 = Education; X_5 = Occupation; X_6 = Income.

The acquired principal data are incorporated into the multiple linear regression method, which involves the prediction of the dependent variable, i.e. DMPI based on nominated independent or explanatory variables selected in the present study. In order to get an error-free outcome, the obtained data has been analyzed using SPSS software. Furthermore, the well-known expressive statistical measures such as frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation are used in the analysis. The beta (standardized regression coefficient) value is used to evaluate how strongly each independent variable affects the dependent variable. R-square value is used to evaluate the goodness of fit that has a range between 0 and 1. Finally, ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) is used to calculate the general implication of the model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section highlights the capabilities of women as the domestic decision maker in the study area. The domestic decision-making ability of women is a crucial factor that governs women's empowerment. Table 1 elaborates the measurement of women's empowerment in connection with various key socio-economic factors that usually differs spatially.

Table 1- Descriptive Statistics of 500 women respondents of Patna city

Code	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Constant	52.9485	9.74197
X ₁	Age Group	2.400	1.0149
X ₂	Religion	1.5140	0.81186
X ₃	Social Group	1.4540	0.70773
X ₄	Education	4.5140	1.65265
X ₅	Occupation	1.5660	0.70045
X ₆	Income	1.5660	0.70045

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V.20 software

The present study conducted over Patna, is based on some predictor variables relevant to women's empowerment. The Multiple Linear Regression Analysis is employed to examine the effect of the 6 explanatory variables on Women's Empowerment (DMPI) of Patna. Table 1 summarized the descriptive analysis of 500

respondents grounded on the fundamental statistical technique, e.g., Mean, Standard Deviation. The mean value DMPI of the area is 52.9485 accompanied by the standard deviation of 9.74197 (Table 1). Among the independent variables, the educational achievement of women has the highest statistical inference.

Table 2- Percentage distribution of response pattern of Explanatory variables

No.	Respondents	Per cent	No.	Respondents	Per cent
1	Age Group		4	Education	
	below 30	18.8		Illiterate	3.6
	30-40	43.0		Primary	10.6
	40-50	17.6		Middle	14.6
	Above 50	20.6		High school	19.0
	Total	100		Intermediate	16.4
2	Religion			Graduation	25.8
	Hindu	66.2		Others	10.0
	Muslim	19.0		Total	100
	Sikh	12.0	5	Occupation	
	Christian	2.8		Un-employed	55.6
	Total	100		Employed in Organized Sector	12.2
3	Social Group			Employed in Unorganized Sector	32.2
	General	36.5		Total	100
	OBC	36.0	6	Income	
	SC	24.8		Below 15000	45.5
	ST	2.7		15000-30000	32.0
	Total	100		Above 30000	22.5
				Total	100

Source: Based on personal survey

Women's Empowerment by Age Group

Age is a relevant factor in understanding the demographic feature of a society. Analysis of age group is helpful for taking suitable measures to maintain the balance between dependant and independent (active) population in a particular society. For the study, age group has been divided into four categories. The distribution of the respondents by age is depicted in Table 2 which

indicates that, out of 500 respondents, 18.8 per cent belonged to the age group of below 30, 43 per cent in the age group of 30-40, 17.6 per cent in the age group of 40-50 and 20.6 per cent women were aged 50 years and above. It is worth mentioning that the relation between women's age and their decision-making power is significant. As women gets older, their power as the domestic decision-maker improves.

Women's Empowerment by Religion

Religion is one of the oldest social obligation and institution of human history. It is peculiar to human beings only. It is one of the most important facets and practise of human culture evident throughout birth, education, marriage, death, etc. Religion is a very sensitive, and personal matter of human life which touches every aspect of his/her socio-cultural life. Religion wise distribution of respondents shows that the majority of women (66.2 per cent) were Hindu followed by 19 per cent

Muslim, 12 per cent Sikh and 2.8 per cent Christian (Table 2). Majority of illiterate respondents were found in Hindu and Muslim religious faith. Their education level was also found to be below the level of high school which contributed to their infrequent decision making. Christian respondents were highly educated because of the positive attitude of their family towards their women. This means that Christian family treated their women as equals, which has enabled women to have equal facilities and opportunities like their male counterpart.

Table 3- Regression Coefficients of the Independent variables of Women Empowerment

Independent variables	Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Constant	29.075	17.234	0.000
Age Group	0.698	2.150	0.032
Religion	0.685	1.690	0.092
Social Group	-0.560	-1.196	0.232
Education	3.615	18.070	0.000
Occupation	3.456	7.547	0.000
Income	3.613	7.777	0.000

Note: N=500; R square = 0.455; Adjusted R² = 0.449, Significant p-levels: (p < 0.01)

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS software

Women's Empowerment by social group

In terms of social groups, 36.5 per cent respondents belonged to the General (traditionally high class) category, 36 per cent comprised of backward class (OBC), while 24.8 per cent and 2.7 per cent of the respondents belonged to the category of scheduled caste (SC) and scheduled tribe (ST) respectively. In the study area, the educational level of the scheduled caste (SC) category was found to be very low because they usually belong to the lower-income group, and social status of their family has been poor historically. General and OBC category respondents were found to be mostly educated due to better income and functional status of their family. The authors observed that the education of women in the family was not satisfactory. Due to conservative society and various types of social stigma, education of women has not taken huge strides. Education of women hasn't been beneficial for the family as girls are married at an

early age and sent off to another family where she usually performs household duties.

Women's Empowerment by Level of Education

Out of all the respondents, 3.6 per cent respondents were found to be illiterate, 10.6 per cent received primary education, 14.6 per cent accumulated middle-level education, 19.0 per cent studied through High school, 16.4 per cent received Intermediate education and 25.8 per cent were Graduates, while only 10 per cent had some professional degree and diploma. The major outcomes indicates that women's education has a substantial effect on their domestic decision-making capabilities. Education contributes significantly (p < 0.01) in growing women's awareness in decision-making (Table 3). Educated women are extra proficient in procurement and accomplishment of a profitable job, which positively affects her economic contribution to family.

Women's Empowerment by Occupation

The data regarding the occupational status reveals that 55.6 per cent of the respondents belonged to the unemployed group, which primarily includes housewives and students. 12.2 per cent of respondents were working in the organized sector. This group involves respondents belonging to government office and other places. 32.2 per cent of respondents were working in the unorganized sector mainly as teachers, employees in semi-scale industries, shopkeepers, self-

Women's Empowerment by Income

Income also regulates the status of women in the family. Additionally, the standard of living has a significant influence on the overall empowerment process of women. It was found that about 45.5 per cent of respondents were having income below Rs 15,000 per month, whereas 32 per cent had their income between Rs15,000-30,000, and 22.5 per cent of respondents were earning more than Rs

business workers, vendors and maid servants etc. Women's occupational status shows a significant relationship with their empowerment and involvement in decision-making. The earning women are seen to be mostly participating in the decision-making, major household procurement, daily domestic purchases and visits to her family or friends than those who are not employed and or earning. The estimated coefficient beta value of 0.225 and significant ($p < 0.01$) value show the positive interrelationship among the occupation and women empowerment (Table 3).

30,000 per month. The salary plays an effective role in the regression model at $p < 0.01$ (Table 3). However, education and income strongly relates to each other. In Patna, high-educated women have more ability in the procurement of a gainful job than those who are less-educated. Women's economic contribution in households can also be reflected from the fact that their family members are dependent on their management skills in spending money.

Table 4- ANOVA for the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Model	Sum of Squares	Degree of freedom	Mean Square	F- value	Sig.(P-value)
Regression	21536.626	6	4307.325	82.405	0.000
Residual	25821.466	494	52.270		
Total	47358.092	499			

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V.20 software

The value of adjusted R^2 (0.455) indicates that all the variables in the current linear regression model account for 45.5 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable women's empowerment. Finally, Table 4 illustrates the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), where the estimated value of F is 82.405 at $P < 0.005$, which is higher than the table value. The outcomes support the overall significance of the present multiple regression model, i.e. women empowerment and involvement in decision-making (dependent variable) in Patna estimated through a set of independent variables.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

A happy and progressive family is always based on the equal contribution of women in family decision-making. In Patna, the power of women in

decision-making has been historically restricted and limited primarily due to patriarchal ideology. Even though women normally possess low decision-making power, various variables such as education, occupation, income etc., affect their decision-making power. In this regard, the present study discovered the variables that expressively contribute to explaining the variation of the decision-making pattern of women in the family. The result of multiple linear regression analysis model shows that the education and employment are closely related to each other and are observed to have a positive effect on women's involvement in family decision-making. The research also showed that education, occupation, incomes have a significant effect in explaining the modification in domestic decision-making power of the women. Alternatively, women's educational attainment, occupation, and

income are positively related to their decision-making abilities.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Purnima Pandey conceived the study and used the primary data collected at the time of her doctoral work in the study area of Patna Metropolitan city. She prepared the first rough draft and wrote the objectives and methodology of the present paper. Alok Kumar Choubey assisted in the manipulation of data and applied statistical techniques according to the scope of the study. Gayatri Rai supervised the overall structure of the research paper and prepared the final draft of the manuscript.



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